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May 24, 2007

Ralph J. Cicerone, President
E. William Colglazier, Executive Officer
National Academy of Sciences
500 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Gentlemen:

I am writing to protest the exclusion by your organization of the public from a meeting of state representatives that was of vital public interest.

Representatives of ten states were meeting May 23 and 24 at the National Academies' Beckman Center to create the Interstate Alliance for Stem Cell Research. Among the professed goals of the meeting were creating opportunities for collaboration among different states' stem cell programs and harmonizing regulations from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Our nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation has monitored California's \$6 billion stem cell program and has made substantial contributions to the program's regulations and policies. I've also worked with representatives of a number of stem cells agencies from other states. It was in fact state representatives who told me about the meeting at the Beckman Center and described it as a follow-up to one held in Connecticut in March to which I had been invited, but had been unable to attend.

I stopped by the meeting in Irvine, CA., late in the afternoon, expecting to catch the last session of the day and meet some of the participants with whom I had only conversed on the telephone. I arrived during a break.

As the meeting reconvened, I was approached by your staff member, Fran Sharples, who told me the session was a "private meeting" of the National Academy of Sciences and I would have to leave.

I was, as I told her, flabbergasted. What could be of more public interest than policies and procedures to administer publicly funded stem cell research?

When the public is shut of the process, we can only wonder what is being done behind closed doors. For instance, in the quest to "harmonize" regulations between states will only the lowest common denominator in regulations be adopted?

Frankly the process smacks of the paternalistic "trust-us-we-know-best" attitude too often displayed by a self-perpetuating bureaucracy supposedly acting in the interest of science. In fact such an attitude is a disservice to both the public and scientists.

Any meetings with representatives of public agencies held under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences need to be open to the public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Simpson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".

John M. Simpson
Stem Cell Project Director

cc: Fran Sharples, Director, Board on Life Sciences, National Academy of Science
Alta Charo, co-chair, NAS Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research Advisory Committee
Robert Klein, Chairman ICOC
Lori Hoffman, Acting President California Institute for Regenerative Medicine
Warren Wollschalger, Chief, Office of Research and Development, Connecticut Department of Public Health
Marianne Horn, Director of Legal Services, Office of Research and Development, Connecticut Department of Public Health